

# **Mirror, Mask and Anti-self: Forces of Literary Creation in Dion Fortune and W. B. Yeats**

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In what follows, we will explore some of the links between self-creation and artistic creation in the works of two early twentieth-century occultists who were also responsible for works of fiction and poetry: the novelist Dion Fortune, and the great modern poet W. B. Yeats. A part of my concern will be to show how the functions and processes of creative activity documented by these authors may be mapped onto a set of essentially Freudian ideas, particularly those surrounding narcissism.

## **Freud, Narcissism, and the Occult**

While it is obviously beyond our scope to summarize all that has fallen out from Freud's brief but seminal article "On Narcissism: An Introduction," it is necessary to lay out a few key aspects of his version of narcissism here. In the most basic terms set out by Freud, narcissism is a libidinal cathexis of the self (or ego); however implicitly in the form described by Freud, and ever more explicitly in the works of those following him, what this really means is a libidinal cathexis of a self-representation (since only in the state of primary narcissism, i.e., babyhood, does the subject lack distinction between "self" and "object" to the point where a simple and undivided self-love is possible). A narcissistic cathexis thus involves in essence an image (or reflection, mirroring) of the self to which love (libidinal energy) is directed (as in the myth of Narcissus).

Both in Freud's work and later elaborations of his ideas by other authors, ideas of the self as healthy and mature tend to emphasise a balance of cathexis of self and object representations. To simplify somewhat Freud's schema of individual development, maturation of the self involves moving from a state of primary narcissism where

ego is all, to a perception that there is a difference between ego and all, and ultimately to a respectful understanding of the difference between self and other, which enables the morally conscious social human being.

Within the Freudian framework, development of a mature ego and of successful object relations are intimately connected. Narcissistic love can be seen within this context as part of a continuum of activity that becomes pathological (both in the views of Freud and later writers, though differently so) only when individuals are so dominated by narcissistic love that realistic object relations are to a greater or lesser degree excluded from their experience. While neither Freud nor others following him suggest that narcissistic cathexis *per se* is bad for the health, there is a tendency within the general conversation on narcissism to see the ability to maintain successful object relations as a sign of health. Narcissistic cathexes have tended from the time of Freud to be more associated with pathologies of the self at the outset; the notion that narcissistic love has positive aspects is upheld throughout the theoretical discourse, but nevertheless upheld with some difficulty.

In post-Freudian elaborations of narcissism, narcissistic pathologies are those characterized by the subject's inability to maintain successful object relations, and concomitantly by weak self-boundaries and an ongoing difficulty maintaining a sense of self without help from other people. In essence, from the individual point of view, narcissism becomes pathological when self-representations cannot ever be left alone, but require ongoing energy and attention to keep them from falling apart. However, recurrent anxieties about self representations in some degree are normal. A useful definition of narcissism is offered by Robert Stolorow: "Mental activity is narcissistic to the degree that its function is to maintain the structural cohesiveness, temporal stability and positive affective colouring of the self representation."<sup>1</sup>

My primary interest in this essay is the way in which the creation of literary works—poetry in the case of Yeats, novels in the case of Dion Fortune—is theorized by these two writers as having a narcissistic function in the sense defined by Stolorow: the literary work involves an act of creating a psychically active

(i.e., narcissistically cathected) representation of the self, which is, as Stolorow says, structurally coherent, temporally stable, and positively affectively coloured. What I want to do is not simply to show that the literary works of Fortune and Yeats are narcissistically cathected (something which Freud and those following him would see as normal for artists), but that their ways of thinking about—theorizing—what is going on when art is created is structurally similar to Freudian ways of thinking about—theorizing—narcissistic activity.

How much these authors may actually have known of Freud is open to question. Fortune drops Freud's name often, though to my knowledge her only citation of one of his actual works is to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It is clear from the bibliography in her *Machinery of the Mind* that she was familiar with many popularizing digests of psychoanalytical and biological theory, and it seems probable that her absorption of Freudian thought was at least partly indirect, informed by these secondary sources. The same may be true of Yeats, who never mentions Freud by name, but clearly has independent acquaintance with many of ideas referred to by Fortune as Freudian.

Both Fortune and Yeats refer frequently to the "subconscious" mind, which is not only the realm of things that cannot be consciously thought (for Fortune, at least, contiguous with Freud's unconscious), but also the realm where the soul goes after death, inhabited by the dead as well as our own inactive memories. Through the subconscious mind we can also reach other entities—the dead and discarnate spirits—who belong to us or have something to do with us. (This idea of "subconscious" material belongs to the realm of psychology as well as occultism, but in a way that is pre-Freudian.) Fortune and Yeats also assume the reality of reincarnation; they share similar ideas of life to life expiation—that is, some of our karma in each life belongs to things not fully expiated or completed from past lives.

Neither Yeats nor Fortune speak of narcissism, nor do they have much use for the Freudian terminologies of self structure (id, ego, super ego, ego ideal); they also do not use the parallel Jungian terminologies (ego, persona, shadow, anima, self). Rather, both have highly idiosyncratic terminologies describing structures of the self,

which are clearly informed by their training in theosophy and ritual magic.

My aim here is to triangulate the Freudian understandings of the self and its narcissistic representations with occultist ideas of the way self representations worked in magical and artistic creation, especially as these are elaborated in Yeats and Fortune. All three writers are more or less contemporary, Freud and Yeats dying in the same year (1939) and Fortune, the youngest of the three, just seven years later (1946). Fortune took an active interest in psychology at a time when Freud's name had begun to be firmly identified with an idea of "science" and she uses Freud's name often as a kind of metonymy for the (scientific) psychological and neurological disciplines as a whole. However Freud himself emerged from a milieu where psychology and psychical research were interlinked disciplines; the objective and secular understanding of the psyche evident in Freud's psychoanalysis was partly the result of a deliberate distancing from magic and spiritualistic phenomena—areas where other psychologists were still engaged in active research. Alex Owen gives a lucid overview of the relations between concepts of consciousness and dream interpretation in Freud, F. W. H. Myers, and several occultist thinkers, including Yeats; however it is worth looking a little more closely at a particular moment in the history of these relations.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in a useful article by James Keeley, Freud agreed to publish a seminal article, titled "A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis," in the 1912 *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* at the invitation of F. W. H. Myers, a psychologist of voluminous output, better known at that time than Freud.<sup>3</sup> Writing of emergent theories of human personality, Myers notes certain commonalities of thought:

Conceptions of what I have called stratified consciousness are now coming to the front in so many places that it may be of interest to remark that (so far as I know) such a conception first presented itself independently to three observers as the result of three different lines of experiment. Mr. Gurney was led that way by experiments on hypnotic memory; M. Pierre Janet by experiments on hysteria; and to myself the observation of various automatisms neither hysterical nor hypnotic— as

automatic script and the like—brought a still more developed (I do not say a better established) conception of the stratified nature of our psychical being, of the higher faculties discernable in the deeper strata, and of the unity which comprehends them all.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly Myers's notion of stratified consciousness as he describes it here (without reference to Freud) bears more resemblance to the occultist notions than to Freud's; however Freud's own version of the unconscious was given an important push by Myers invitation, and almost certainly as well by a certain resistance to Myers's own thought. Freud's "Note on the Unconscious," written at Myers's instigation, propounds a theory radically different from the broader and more fluid ideas shared by Myers and the occultist thinkers.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most salient difference between this picture of stratified consciousness and Freud's is that, as Keeley intelligently describes it, for Myers, et al., ideas can emerge from preconsciousness to consciousness *if they are strong enough*—there is a constant commerce between conscious and subconscious material—whereas for Freud, unconscious ideas and impulses remain unconscious *no matter how strong they are*; they can only be recuperated from the realm of the unconsciousness by analysis of the patterns they leave on the subjects dreams and behavior. Myers's notion of personality is thus a more fundamentally integrated entity; in essence Freud argues for a "human personality composed of irreconcilable parts."<sup>6</sup>

Subconscious action and material as evident in the idea of Yeats and Fortune tend to resemble those of Myers, et al., rather more than they do Freudian ones. However, there are points in the writings of both occultists where we see a concept of the structure of human personality with more marked resemblances to Freud in their implicit understanding of the "irreconcilable parts" of the human self. These occur notably around the concepts of what happens in the process of artistic creation, and in the uses of art and poetry as a repair for states of functional damage to the self occasioned by normal life. In this area occultists seem to think with concepts innately closer to Freud's.

## Union with Anti-self in the Work of W. B. Yeats

In an early essay on magic, Yeats speaks of magic as a manifestation (and manipulation) of several minds working collectively, or of the operation of the "great mind":

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines. . .

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.<sup>7</sup>

While Yeats embraces several different versions of his own metaphysics over the long course of his life, he seems to adhere to the basic principles here stated in both his early and his late writings. The notion that "the borders of our mind are ever shifting" belongs what I have come to think of as his theorization of "weak boundaries" of the self—that is, he understood that all minds were in a state of some interpenetration at all times, the degree of interpenetration being governed by strength of imagination. It is evident here and elsewhere that Yeats does not distinguish between psychic and imaginative phenomena, for in the magical workings he describes here, he says that the magically induced visions that occurred when his imagination "began to move of itself." Though the images he saw were "never too vivid to be imagination, as I had always understood it, [they] had yet a motion of their own, a life I could not change or shape."<sup>8</sup> And later in the essay he adds,

If all who have described events like this have not dreamed, we should rewrite our histories, for all men, certainly all imaginative men, must be for ever casting forth enchantments, glammers, illusions; and all men, especially tranquil men who have no powerful egotistic life, must be continually passing under their power.<sup>9</sup>

By the "powerful egotistic life," it seems that Yeats means to indicate in a general way whatever is independent in the processes of the self. The power to cast "glamours," "illusions" derives from the fact that the processes of the self in those who are "imaginative" cannot contain themselves; they keep on working, even when not willed to work, and they overflow onto other people, sometimes causing intended or unintended intersubjective effects. Only from magic, understood as an imaginative act performed in co-operation with other linked minds, does Yeats derive evidence that the power of the imaginative self can be guided, making a continuous experience which is validated by the fact that it is shared.

If Yeats's imagination has "a will of its own" that enables him to participate psychically in the experiences of others, the state of his conscious mind alone and at rest he describes as distressingly fragmented, lacking in continuity. In extracts from a diary kept in 1909 (eight years after the essay on magic) which are published in his autobiography, he writes:

The pain others give passes away in their later kindness, but that of our own blunders, especially when they hurt our vanity, never passes away. Our own acts are isolated and one act does not buy absolution for another. They are always present before a strangely abstract judgment. We are never a unity, a personality to ourselves. ... Vanity is so intimately associated with our spiritual identity that whatever hurts it, above all if it came from it, is more painful in the memory than serious sin, and yet I do not think it follows that we are very vain.<sup>10</sup>

This inability to put his own personality together on an experiential level (the sense that he is "never a unity", that his acts are "isolated" from each other, and that the bad acts or "blunders" must always remain an unabsolved part of his consciousness) he links to the need for creative activity:

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. We put on a grotesque or solemn painted face to

hide us from the terrors of judgment. . . a game like that of a child, where one loses the infinite pain of self-realisation.<sup>11</sup>

There is an ongoing tension between the mask and the self (or the *Mask* and the *Will*<sup>12</sup>), for if the Will is "self," the mask is simultaneously "not oneself" and an "other self," and the entry into it is described at once as an escape into child's play and as a rebirth. Both self and not self, the Mask is something which can be experienced as free from the "terrors of judgement" and which "has no memory" (therefore knows no past to judge). It is a kind of projection which enables freedom from the condition of incoherence normal to Yeats (and surely in some degree part of the human condition).

Elsewhere Yeats indicates that this experience is not always as easy as the metaphor of child's play would suggest; in "Hodos Chameliontos" (1922), the union with Mask or Image is described as something brought about by a kind of crisis generated by the interaction with "personifying spirits":

There are indeed personifying spirits that we had best call but Gates and Gatekeepers, because through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis, to Mask and Image. . . They have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair.<sup>13</sup>

And speaking of the greatest of all poets—Villon and Dante—he writes:

The two halves of their nature are so completely conjoined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet to desire whatever happens, being at the same instant predestinate and free, creation's very self. We gaze at such men in awe because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and it may even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up, because that birth, that re-creation, is from terror.<sup>14</sup>

There is an interesting ambiguity in this passage inasmuch as Yeats seems to keep deliberately vague any sense of distinction between the self of the poet and the poem of the self: what is created



in the greatest poetry is not a "work of art" but "a new man" or perhaps "a new species of man"; yet of course it must be a work of art too. What gives such poetry its enormous power is the completeness of the melding of the "two halves"—the self and the Anti-self—resulting from the crisis brought about by the "personifying spirits" (a curious term by which he appears to mean spirits whose work is to concretize and realize human personality). But does this melding occur in the poet or in the poem? Characteristically, Yeats prefers to leave us with the question; and it is with all humility that I would suggest that perhaps the poem itself is the mask with which the poet joins; the poem becomes as he writes a part of the architecture of his identity—a part which *was not there before*, and yet is, indisputably, *himself* from the moment of its creation.

Yeats elsewhere admits that such a union cannot remain a part of one's experience of the self in this life:

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria. . . . he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete. . . . He is part of his own phantasmagoria, and we adore him because nature has grown intelligible, and by so doing a part of our creative power.<sup>15</sup>

By his personal tragedies, the poet is brought to crisis, generating the poem in which the poet experiences his "rebirth as an idea." Here, as in the passage above, we note how the act of writing a poem is (simply assumed to be) an act of self-construction or self creation; there is not anywhere a clear distinction made between the written object and the self of the author, except that the self constructed in the poem is not the ordinary man "who sits down to breakfast"; but it is not the poem that is called intended and complete (as though it were something separate from the author): it is the poet himself.

In this respect, what Yeats describes as the function of poetry maps closely onto the function of what Freud describes as the ideal ego in his essay "On Narcissism." Freud notes first that there is a force which watches over our actions and judges them; it is internal

to the self, but sometimes feels external; paranoia is a regressive manifestation of this power (for which Freud has not yet developed a terminology, but will later be called 'superego'). This power at bottom is an internalized embodiment of parental criticism, which continues its development through the absorption and internalization of cultural and institutional ethical systems and renders impossible the original self love of primary narcissism. The power is directly responsible for the formation of the ideal ego—a representation of the self, like the ego but more perfect, and still capable of cathexis. Freud writes:

libidinal instinctual impulses undergo the vicissitudes of pathogenic repression if they come into conflict with the subject's cultural and ethical ideas. ... Repression, we have said, proceeds from the ego; we might say with greater precision that it proceeds from the self-respect of the ego. . . For the ego, the formation of an ideal would be the conditioning factor of repression.

This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced onto this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value. ... [Man] is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgment, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal.<sup>16</sup>

As the ideal ego is generated as compensation for the critical faculties of the self, so the poet's creation of the poem becomes a kind of imaginative compensation for the self who sits down to breakfast, fragmented, judged and unabsolved. The poet's self is displaced onto his work—a new self representation to which cathexis is once again possible.

Interestingly, it appears from Yeats's writing that the poem is not only narcissistically cathected for the poet; it is capable of being narcissistically cathected—cathected as a self-representation— by his audience as well. The hearer adores the poet, Yeats says, because the poem may become part of the process of his own identity

construction just as it is the poet's, because "nature" (that is, human nature) "has grown intelligible, and by so doing a part of our creative power." So the "intended" poet-self which the poem *becomes* also *becomes* a cathected part of our own listening selves. It is in this way that the solitary imaginative act involved in poetry returns to the social world—not as an object in the world, but as a part of the listener, a new piece of the listener's identity which has been created or realized by the poet's crisis.

This, then, is the use of art for Yeats. Poetry is made out of the forces that also make magic (forces which are real in the domain of the imagination), but it does something even magic cannot do: it creates, at least when it is being written, and probably recurrently whenever the poet experiences audience cathexis on the poem, a sense of coherent self, protected both from its own fragmenting, destabilizing judgment and from intrusions by the imaginations of others. Further, this coherent self, this identity spilling over with meaning and free from pain, is something that can be shared by others, realizing the poet and the hearer at once. Like magic, it is ultimately a shared experience; but it differs from magic in that it is more fully generated by processes of self-construction within the poet.

### **Magical Bodies in the Work of Dion Fortune**

More than Yeats, Fortune thinks of the forces which propel human beings as libidinal forces, and she also tends to think of the frustration or blocking of libidinal forces as causes of illness. She does not situate herself in the discussion on narcissism; however, because of her willingness to embed herself in the terminology of psychoanalysis, and to cross reference between psychological and magical terms, it is not difficult to extend her mapping of the forces and structures she describes onto Freud's.

Fortune also explicitly connects novels with fantasies of wish-fulfillment (understood as an extension of the experience of dreaming). In the introduction to her novel *The Sea Priestess*, she describes the combination of interpretation and wish fulfillment performed in the novel as having the same function as psychotherapy:

People read fiction in order to supplement the diet life provides for them. If life is full and varied, they like novels that analyse and interpret it for them; if life is narrow and unsatisfying, they supply themselves with mass production wish fulfilments from the lending libraries. I have managed to fit my book in between these two stools so neatly that it is hardly fair to say that it falls between them. It is a novel of interpretation and a novel of wish-fulfillment at the same time.

Yet after all, why should not the two be combined? They have to be in psychotherapy, where I learnt my trade. . . I think that if readers in their reading will identify themselves with one or another of the characters according to taste, they will be led to a curious psychological experience — the experience of the therapeutic use of phantasy, an unappreciated aspect of psychotherapy.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Freud, for whom dreaming is used largely to furnish evidence of a wish likely to be hidden from the dreamer, it is evident here that Fortune describes what might be called active dreaming, the construction of wishes that become experiential through being enacted in processes analogous to dreaming. For Fortune, psychotherapy involves both the active encouragement of such dream processes and the interpretation of their causes and results. There are various ways of going about the process of activating our own dream life, and one of them is novel reading. Another, of course, is magic.

When Fortune describes the construction of a Magical Body, it is clear even from the opening sentence that this act has fundamental similarities with the act of novel reading. Her essay begins by citing a work of fiction: "James Branch Cabell has a story of the dull, ordinary Felix Kennaston who makes for himself an imaginary personality named 'Horvendile' through whom he experiences high adventure."<sup>18</sup> After briefly commenting on the utility of such fantasies in retaining good mental health, noting how much easier they are for children than adults, and linking the production of both magic and fiction to the "same level of the subliminal mind," Fortune goes on:

There is a technique in the repertoire of the adept by means of which he builds himself just such a vehicle of experience as Cabell made his dreary hero create in the imaginary personality of 'Horvendile.' Equipped with such an instrument formed out of such stuff as dreams are made of we

can enter the dream world of the astral plane and act out therein a dramatic representation of our subliminal lives.

. . . I had long been familiar with the method of going forth by night in the Horvendile body. . . In my own experience of the operation, the utterance to myself of my magical name led to the picturing of myself in an idealized form, not differing in type, but upon an altogether grander scale, superhuman in fact, but recognizable as myself, as a statue more than life-size may be a good likeness. Once perceived, I could re-picture this idealized version of my body and personality at will, but I could not identify myself with it *unless I uttered my magical name* [original emphasis]. Upon my affirming it as my own identification was immediate.<sup>19</sup>

When Fortune alludes to "such stuff as dreams are made of" she evokes the context of Prospero's famous speech from the last act of *The Tempest*: as the play ends, the magical theatre becomes a metaphor for the human condition, in which life is "rounded by a sleep": we have lived the life of the play within our own lives, which are ultimately not less made of dreamstuff. Fortune's wish fulfillment is a kind of functional conceptual hybrid which combines Prospero's magical dreamstuff with Freud's dreamwork. For Prospero, identification of the magical life of the theatre with real life is a kind of platonic joke: life itself is an illusion, a wish fulfillment operation not fundamentally more real than the theatre. For Freud, on the other hand, dreaming is no joke, because the "wish" involved, though hidden from the dreamer, is a real agent: desires and wishes are *forces* which operate on us, altering our very actions and behaviors in the world even when they are not conscious. For Fortune, a wish can be a real force *and* an illusion *simultaneously*: the point is that the force behind the illusion is manipulable. The wish is real, and thereby affects reality (which reflects the dreamstuff underneath it). The real force of wishing, which is one of the processes of the self, can also generate alternative selves, idealized and superhuman but real on their own plane.

The question is not so much how to generate these idealized selves (which we do all the time), but how, as adults, we may properly realise them: step into and *inhabit* them, on the plane in which they exist as real. For Fortune, the use of a magical name facilitates the identification of self and object, affirming the imaginary double as

"self" because the magical name belongs to both. The astral plane is the theatre of these therapeutic doubles, where the ordinary self may be released into a new personality, the self "in an idealized form. . . superhuman in fact," rendered capable of adventures not offered by ordinary life but still necessarily ours, "part of our subliminal lives."

It should already be plain that the magical body has some characteristics in common with Freud's ideal ego; but whereas the ideal ego is generated as a kind of byproduct of an unconscious wish (repressed through a negative self experience), the magical body appears here to be a largely conscious creation (albeit connected to the 'subliminal life'—not fully unconscious nor perhaps fully conscious either).

The generation of magical bodies finds a fuller development in Fortune's novels, in particular *The Sea Priestess*, and *Moon Magic*, the two which concern the character of Lilith LeFay Morgan. Lilith LeFay is depicted as an archetype of the fatal woman, mysterious, attractive to men, and a magical adept, a priestess of many lives. She is described as looking like a woman in her mid to late thirties but (due to the influence of regenerative magical forces) she is spectacularly well preserved, and her real age is revealed as nearer to one hundred and twenty. Besides being older than most, this fatal woman has another unusual quality for the type: instead of destroying the men who fall in love with her (always at the point of meeting her they are sick, repressed, lonely, and near nervous collapse) she heals them. She does this not by satisfying their needs in any ordinary sexual way, but rather by inducing to do magic with her. She uses the reflection their desiring admiration provides to build a magical body, a larger than life image of herself as Priestess of Isis, thus channeling all the stray libidinal forces in the men's lives into a massive cathexis of her own image, bringing down the Goddess who (as it were) eats the surplus libido, and returns them to themselves refreshed and freed of their complexes. Lilith is thus not merely the ideal woman and ideal magician; she is also the ideal psychotherapist.

It is not difficult to see Lilith LeFay as a larger than life superhuman projection of Dion Fortune. In this regard it is perhaps unsurprising that there is an epilogue to *Moon Magic* channeled

after Fortune's death by a member of the Society of the Inner Light, in which Lilith LeFay appears again, this time identified straightforwardly as a magical body of Dion Fortune:

I am the same being who dominated Dion Fortune when she wrote *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*. I am well characterized as 'Morgan' and as 'Lilith Le Fay' in these books and I was known by many names among the ancients but today I am best described a persona or magical body.<sup>20</sup>

It seems likely that Fortune herself had entertained similar ideas, though she is less quick to own them. In the introduction to *Moon Magic*, Fortune writes, "If it be true that what is created in the imagination lives in the inner world, then what have I created in Lilith LeFay? ... why did she live on after the book about her was finished, and insist on appearing again? Have I furnished myself with a dark familiar?"<sup>21</sup> If Lilith can be channeled independently of Fortune, it would certainly appear that she has gained an autonomous life—a dark familiar indeed.

If Lilith LeFay is identified as a magical body, or autonomous, idealized self-representation of Dion Fortune, it is of interest that she herself experiences herself as divided. Lilith's aspect as priestess of Isis is a constructed "body" too; and early in *Moon Magic*, Lilith speaks of her experiences with this secondary persona in her childhood:

So I came back to the world yet once again as the priestess of the Great Goddess, bringing with me the memory of forgotten arts, one of which is the art of being a woman. I came because I was sent. There was that needed which I had to give.

... I had only my woman's personality with which to work, and I had to create and build it as if it were a work of art, and I worked on myself like a sculptress. It was an odd sensation to feel the two aspects of myself merging, and finally uniting. In the earlier stages I would be either in one consciousness or the other. ... Twice, in crises that might have destroyed the physical personality I was so laboriously building, I united my two selves momentarily, but the child-mind could not stand more than a brief uniting—life was difficult enough as it was.

With adolescence everything closed down. ... when I stabilised with

maturity, it began to open again and I was conscious of an overshadowing. ...I thought of this overshadowing as a spirit control, but gradually I became aware that it was simply my own higher self... My two selves have never been permanently in me, for no human physique would stand that; nor can I invoke my higher self at will, but I know how to make the conditions that cause it to come in. Unfortunately that is a thing in which I always need to have help: I cannot do it single-handed; someone has to see the Goddess in me, and then She manifests...

As I have already said, Wilfred<sup>22</sup> gave me the help I needed in formulating myself to myself.<sup>23</sup>

We may note the difficulty Lilith has in combining the two halves of her self into a whole. As with Yeats' union with Mask or Anti-self in his poetry, Lilith's momentary melding with her alternate personality feels like a "crisis"; and as with Yeats' Masks, too, there seem to be opposing elements in the two selves: they struggle against each other, they cannot comfortably coexist for an extended period, for "no human physique could stand that"; their unity is desirable, but necessarily short lived.

But there are aspects to Lilith's attempts to bring down her magical body which distance this concept from Yeats' Anti-self: while the Mask with which Yeats becomes united in his poetry can be cathected by others after the fact, Lilith's secondary personality, as noted already, *requires* a cathexis by another person in order to make the conditions right for it to appear. She needs to have with her someone (preferably male and in love with her) who can "see the Goddess" in her. In order that she may be able to "formulate herself to herself" she needs a mirror. In *Moon Magic*, this mirror is Rupert Malcolm.

Not coincidentally, the ritual for the bringing down of Isis in needs a literal mirror as well; and there is a mirror over the altar in Lilith's temple which plays an important role in the magical operation. This mirror Lilith identifies for Rupert Malcolm as "the Door Without a Key," or the door to the astral plane. Lilith has earlier identified the "Door Without a Key" as the door to the unconscious:



This we call the Door Without a Key, which is also the Door of Dreams; Freud found it, and he used it for the coming forth by day; but we who are initiates use it for going forth by night. I regret that I must speak in riddles concerning these things, but not otherwise can they be spoken of.<sup>24</sup>

But this riddle is not difficult to resolve; it is as close as Fortune comes to making an explicit distinction between the process of Freudian psychoanalysis and her own form of magical psychotherapy. If Fortune had been able to tease out Lilith's riddle here, she might have said something like this: Freud's therapy is a 'going forth by day' because his method involves laying open to the daylight the unconscious libidinal promptings of the subject through interpretation of dreams, thereby releasing the cathexis on dissociated complexes. Her therapy is a 'going forth by night' because her method involves restructuring the darkness of subliminal mind by entering into it and creating benevolent complexes by channeling a libidinal cathexis ("magnetism" or "vital force") onto a set of desired forms. Both of these processes work as a way of releasing the undesirable blocked libidinal urges, which, for both Freud and Fortune, are understood to cause illness in the subject.

A vivid picture of how the magical process works to release this blockage—like sex, but different—is presented in the ritual descriptions of *Moon Magic*. Here, in the ritual for bringing down Isis, both Lilith and Malcolm, in their ceremonial robes, are in the earthly temple, illumined only by candlelight, looking into the dark mirror above the altar. Lilith is behind Malcolm, with her arms over his shoulders; Malcolm, in a state of extreme tension, is gripping Lilith's hands so hard that he is causing some pain:

We both looked in the mirror. There was the man's haggard face, the eyes almost mad; and above it a woman's face, perfectly calm, floating apparently in space, for my black robe was invisible in the darkness. The silver head-dress caught the light. The black pools of the eyes held no expression. It did not seem like my face even to me.

Then behind me, there began to be a warmth and a power. Isis was formulating.

Above my head I saw Hers. I was no longer conscious of the agony in my hands or the strain on my body. All I felt was the power flowing through me in electric heat...

Over the man and myself there formed a cloud, a silvery cloud of palest moon mist, slowly glowing to gold and growing warm as it glowed. It was the aura of Isis emanating from us, from our united magnetism. It is the thing that is behind marriage. It held for a while and then it slowly dissolved. Magnetism had gone off from both of us, and Isis had absorbed it. Malcolm dropped back against my breast, and I thought he had fainted till I heard him give a prolonged sigh... I could feel his hands sweating. Mine were cold as ice, so I knew which way the power had flowed.<sup>25</sup>

Characteristically, the description evokes sex without actually describing sex. The materialization of Isis in the mirror above Lilith's head seems to occur at the moment that would precede a sexual climax, and is followed by the sudden flow of power, "like electric heat," which takes the place of ejaculation. An aura forms around them for a little while, until the residue of magnetism is devoured by Isis (a projection of the whole, fully realized ideal self of Lilith LeFay) leaving no mess. Upon absorbing the "magnetism" which went into her creation, Isis dematerializes, leaving both parties relaxed, experiencing only the residue of their polarity. It seems clear how this process helps to heal Rupert of the libidinal blockage which has given him only half a life prior to this experiment: for him, it is a straightforward channeling of sexual energy into magic. It is less clear at the outset how the operation works for Lilith—whether, that is, she has any libidinal cathexis of her own, or what the health benefits of formulating Isis might be for her. As represented in the novel, Lilith seems to be a fully autonomous being, free of sexual desires and simultaneously free of the neuroses and illnesses that plague ordinary people. Indeed she evidently has no needs of other human beings at all, save one: the need to be mirrored by another person to bring down the goddess, to experience her ideal self as real. Given the essentially Freudian principles underlying the understanding of health and illness in Fortune's work, it may be hypothesized that what keeps Lilith psychologically functional (or perhaps super-functional) is the strong cathexis on her own self representation as a Goddess. The fact is that this self-representation

cannot be maintained without the admiring attention of men, so she does have needs; but she plainly has no object cathexes. Her narcissism forms a complete closed circuit.

*Moon Magic* is the last novel Dion Fortune wrote, and it is generally agreed to be her richest piece of fiction. Much of its richness inheres in the way the novel documents the process of its own construction: all the lovingly detailed acts of mirror magic by which Lilith formulates herself to herself in the novel can be retrofitted onto the process by which Dion Fortune constructs Lilith LeFay. Both moon magic and *Moon Magic* involve quintessentially narcissistic operations.

### **Erschaffend wurde ich gesund**

One of the key insights in Freud's essay "On Narcissism" is the idea that we must love in order not to fall ill. Freud himself makes a connection between the idea of "love" and the act of creation via a poem from Heine. I quote Freud:

A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love. This follows somewhat on the lines of Heine's picture of the psychogenesis of the Creation:

Krankheit ist wohl der letzte Grund  
Des ganzen Schöpferdrangs gewesen;  
Erschaffend konnte ich genesen,  
Erschaffend wurde ich gesund.<sup>26</sup>

I note first that in this passage there seems to be little distinction drawn between the formation of libidinal cathexes, the idea of "love" and the idea of creation (in this case of the universe by God, but the analogy in the verse is obviously also to artistic creation). "To love," in Freud's usage here, would appear equivalent to, "to charge an object (whether internal or external to the self) with a cathexis." Libidinal cathexis associates itself with creativity in the power to cure illness: both involve discharges of psychic energy. Creativity is thus a form of "love" as the term is being used here.

This is one of the key points of congruity between the three authors I have discussed. Freud, Fortune and Yeats all clearly see

the creations of an artist as being cathected as a part of the artist's self. It is perhaps a key point binding Yeats and Fortune that they also see these creations as narcissistically cathected by others—that is, these artistic creations are sought out and needed by other people because completing the selves of readers too. They do something similar for both artist and audience, by providing a link to a self-representation which is a “completed idea.”—whether an incarnate version of self united with Anti-self (as in Yeats), or a larger than life persona with a range of avenues for libidinal cathexis and catharsis (as in Fortune). In both cases, for the novelist and poet, the works of fiction and poetry offer a crucial form of repair to selves which otherwise are at risk (in Yeats's world) of lapsing into “the pain of self-realisation,” a kind of chaotic incoherence, or alternatively (in Fortune's world) of being torn to shreds by drives which have no means of externalization.

Narcissistic cathexis has also been associated with creative activity, not only by Freud himself, of course, but by others following him. In a paper first published in the 1960s, Heinz Kohut combats what he sees as a pervasive tendency to understand narcissistic cathexis as *essentially* inferior to object cathexis. His approach is to evaluate the qualities of empathy, creativity, humor, and wisdom as positive “transformations of narcissism.” He notes that creative output is always narcissistically cathected:

The fetishist's attachment to the fetish has the intensity of an addiction, a fact which is a manifestation not of object love but of a fixation on an early object that is experienced as part of the self. Creative artists, and Scientists, may be attached to their work with the intensity of an addiction, and they try to control and shape it with forces and for purposes which belong to a narcissistically experienced world. They are attempting to re-create a perfection which formerly was directly an attribute of their own.<sup>27</sup>

We are able to see an essentially similar, and I believe essentially Freudian theorization of narcissistic cathexis as a generator of creative output in the writings of both Yeats and Fortune. I wonder only about the degree to which creative output should actually be considered a positive “transformation” of narcissism, or in fact its very essence.

## Notes

1. "Toward a Functional Definition of Narcissism" (1975) collected in *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, ed. Andrew P. Morrison (New York: NYU Press, 1986), 198.
2. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); see especially chapter 5, 174 ff. Also for a useful analysis of the roots of some of Jung's ideas which are more contiguous with occultism see John Ryan Haule, "From Somnambulism to the Archetypes: The French Roots of Jung's Split with Freud," *The Psychoanalytic Review*, 71.4 (1984), 635-659.
3. "Subliminal Promptings: Psychoanalytic Theory and the Society for Psychical Research" *American Imago*, 58.4 (2001), 767-791
4. Myers, "The Mechanism of Hysteria", *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1893-94), 15, quoted in Keeley, 774-5.
5. It is also in this article that we find the first usage of the distinctively Freudian term "unconscious"; see the OED sv "unconscious".
6. Keeley, 780.
7. "Magic," (1901) in *Essays and Introductions*, (London: MacMillan, 1961), 28.
8. "Magic," 29.
9. "Magic," 40.
10. From "The Death of Synge" (1909) in *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Collier, 1965), 340.
11. Ibid.
12. See the explanation of the terms "Mask," "Will," "Body of Fate" and "Creative Mind" in *A Vision* (NY: Macmillan, 1937), 73 ff: "It will be enough [for the moment]. . . to describe *Will* and *Mask* as the will and its object, or the *Is* and the *Ought* (or that which should be), *Creative Mind* and *Body of Fate* as thought and its object, or the *Knower* and the *Known*." Yeats's *Will* is elsewhere referred to in *A Vision* as the "normal ego" and *Mask* as the "object of desire, or idea of the good" (83). It seems clear that "Will" here can be mapped with little distortion onto the Freudian "ego" and "Mask" (a concept also referred to in Yeats's oeuvre as "Image" and "Anti-self") onto Freud's "ideal ego."
13. *Autobiography*, 183.
14. Ibid.

15. From "A General Introduction to My Work" (1937), in *Essays and Introductions* (cited above), 509. "Phantasmagoria" is a term which received greater development in *A Vision* as a part of the stage of "Dreaming Back," one of the six stages which prepares the discarnate soul for its next life; see *A Vision*, "The Completed Symbol," 230 ff.
16. "On Narcissism: An Introduction," 36.
17. Fortune, *The Sea Priestess* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1978; first published 1938), 7.
18. From *Applied Magic*, chapter 9, "A Magical Body," in *Dion Fortune's Applied Magic and Aspects of Occultism* (London: Aquarian Press, 1987), 55. Throughout the essay, Fortune uses the term 'Horvendile body' as an alternative for 'magical body.'
19. "A Magical Body," 57.
20. "The Death of Vivien Le Fay Morgan" in *Applied Magic*, 166.
21. *Moon Magic* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1978, originally published 1956), 10.
22. Male protagonist of *Sea Priestess*.
23. *Moon Magic*, 54-5
24. *Moon Magic*, 76.
25. *Moon Magic*, 133.
26. "On Narcissism," 28. This edition leaves the poem in German, offering the following in a footnote: "God is imagined as saying: 'Illness was no doubt the final cause of the whole urge to create. By creating, I could recover; by creating, I became healthy.'" *Neue Gedichte*, "Schöpfungslieder VII'.
27. Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism, " in *Essential Papers*, cited above, 77.